

Graham Tipple and Suzanne Speak

## Who is homeless in developing countries

### *Differentiating between inadequately housed and homeless people*

In deciding who is housed and who is homeless in developing countries, planners often display muddled thinking, rejecting accommodation which is considered acceptable by its residents. While industrialised nations regard inadequate housing as almost synonymous with homelessness, this congruence may be unhelpful in developing countries in which a large proportion of households live in housing which could be defined as inadequate. From the results of a broad-based research project on homelessness in nine developing countries, this paper attempts to trace the boundaries between inadequate housing and homelessness. It argues that while some informal settlements may provide such poor accommodation that their denizens should be regarded as homeless, others clearly do not. The margins are found to be fuzzy and to vary from country to country. The most important criterion for differentiating between those who are merely inadequately housed and homeless people appears to be whether or not the place allows its occupants to be on an improving trajectory. To reflect the lack of a clear margin and the ability of some streethomeless people to improve in situ, the conceptualisation developed by UN-Habitat based on industrialised countries is modified to more nearly represent reality in developing countries.

The destruction of thousands of shacks and informal dwellings in Zimbabwe's Operation Murambatsvina (Shona for 'Drive out the rubbish'), launched by President Mugabe and his ruling ZANU PF party in May 2005, demonstrates why it is important to differentiate between housing which is acceptable in policy and that which is not and which constitutes homelessness for its occupants. In the logic of Operation Murambatsvina, it was argued that no one was being made homeless because the occupants of the targeted settlements were already homeless. Their structures were illegal shacks ('rubbish'), encroaching on public land, and so had no right to exist (IWPR, 2005).

Such clearances demonstrate the extreme end of a continuum of muddled thinking about what constitutes being housed: whose dwelling is counted and whose is not in a statistical representation of the housing stock in a country. In calculating the current housing stock in India, for example, the statistics distinguish between serviceable units

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(in pucca, semi-pucca and kutcha categories)<sup>1</sup> which are included, and non-serviceable<sup>2</sup> kutcha housing, of which there were 11 million units in 1991 (Government of India, 1996), which are not included. This makes it clear that the Government of India regards people in non-serviceable kutcha dwellings to be in need of housing. But does it, therefore, regard them as homeless?

In the developing world, the word 'homeless' is widely used to designate people whose housing is inadequate, not acceptable, not up to standard. International organisations with 'homeless' in their names, such as Homeless International based in the UK but working internationally, target assistance towards people who live in poor-quality shacks in informal settlements rather than those who are defined specifically as 'homeless'. Insofar as they touch upon housing conditions at all, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aim, in Goal 7, Target 11, to 'have achieved by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers' (World Bank Group, 2004). Thus, many of the activities promoted by organisations and urged by MDG 7 involve upgrading existing inadequate settlements, improving existing housing, servicing existing neighbourhoods, and could easily by-pass the most needy – those without housing.

We work within the context of a global housing shortage, concentrated within cities. In this context, inadequate housing, for which the word 'slum' has been re-adopted for international awareness-raising purposes (for example, in the Global 2003 Report for Human Settlements [UN-Habitat, 2003]), provides shelter for billions of people.

Following all the experience on how seemingly inadequate housing is a staging post in the incremental improvement of households' accommodation through a long housing career,<sup>3</sup> to bundle all 'inadequate housing' together is both inappropriate for policy and insulting to its occupants. There is clearly a need for clarity; especially between those whose incrementally developing housing may be a key to their integration into urban life and those for whom accommodation is an intractable problem.

1 These are defined as follows:

Pucca: a structure whose walls and roof are made of materials such as cement, concrete, oven bricks, stone, stone blocks, jackboards (cement-plastered reeds), iron and other metal sheeting, timber, tiles, slate, corrugated iron, zinc or other metal sheets, asbestos cement sheet, etc.

Kutcha: a structure which has walls and roof made of un-burnt bricks, bamboo, mud, grass, leaves, reeds and/or other thatch.

Semi pucca: the remaining dwellings. Usually their walls are pucca and the roofs are kutcha.

Non-serviceable kutcha units: These are units having both kutcha walls and roofs but characterised by dilapidation and poor state of repair (Das, 2002).

2 Non-serviceable seems to mean not fit for service rather than not able to be provided with services such as water supply.

3 Writers too numerous to name have contributed to the cataloguing of this process. The pedigree starts with Abrams (1964) and Turner (1972; 1976) and continues through Peil (1976), Peattie (1980), Hardoy and Satterthwaite (1989), Schlyter (1987), Ward (1976) and many others.

We contend that the household settled in an unserviced informal settlement, whose two-storey dwelling is built in brick and has some informal infrastructure, cannot be regarded as being in the same category as the man curled up in a blanket on the pavement in the city centre. Which of these, however, is in the same category as the woman and her child living in a shelter made from packing materials and tarpaulin on the railway embankment, or the household whose canopy has occupied the same patch of pavement for fifteen years?

In the discussion on housing issues in developing countries, we feel that it is important to try to differentiate between those whose housing is inadequate, especially with respect to both land tenure and services as found in informal settlements, and those who are homeless. Working in town planning, it is important to differentiate those who should be included as living in the current housing stock and those who should be seen as in need of housing. Similarly, it is important to distinguish between those processes which add viable shelter to the city's stock through household sector activity and those which produce shelter which cannot be regarded as viable in the medium term. As housing shortages continue and heighten in the face of increasing urbanisation, inappropriate decisions about what should be accepted and serviced, and what should be rejected, denied services and slated for future clearance and redevelopment,<sup>4</sup> can be very costly in the housing supply process and cause inestimable damage to households trying hard to make their way in the city while facing eviction.

Most commentators would probably agree to include the most permanent of squatter and other informal settlements in the housed population and their dwellings in the current stock, but would probably be less united about the pavement or railway-land shelters. So where is the threshold? Is it a readily recognisable boundary between conditions or located somewhere within a broad margin? Does it vary from country to country? By what characteristics might it be discerned? These are the questions to which this paper is directed.

4 Several years ago, the first author was talking to the 'squatter control officer' in the City of Kitwe, Zambia, where he had worked as a planner more than a decade previously. We were discussing plans the squatter control unit had for a settlement called 'Brickfields Mulenga' near the city council's Ndeke estate. In contrast to the earlier (1970s) Zambian policy of upgrading squatters, there was a policy at that time to clear the squatters and build a residential area. Being subversive, the author asked the officer if she felt it was reasonable to clear housing to build other housing. Her reply was that the current housing was not of a good enough standard. However, the author argued that he knew of several very well-built houses there. She responded that, if the houses were good enough, they would be left intact. He responded that it would be in the people's interests to improve their homes quickly, so that they would retain their place there, but she felt that only those good enough by a certain date should be accepted.

## Defining homelessness

Current discourses on homelessness, derived from industrialised countries, are of very little help in defining homelessness in developing countries (Tipple and Speak, 2005). It is clear that homelessness in industrialised countries is not, primarily, a product of an overall shortage of housing. It is more the result of a fiscal crisis affecting local, national and global economies which has brought about major structural changes with resulting reshaping of welfare policies, ostensibly in an unavoidable attempt to curb public spending (Foster and Plowden, 1996). This restructuring has led to a lessening of support systems and an increased risk of poverty and homelessness for the mass of the population (Kennett and Marsh, 1999). It has weakened the safety nets which would have supported people through circumstances relating to family breakdown, economic shocks, or problems such as alcohol and other substance abuse which lead to homelessness.

In industrialised countries, the definition of homelessness has been widening over the years to include those in shared and transient accommodation, those with certain levels of overcrowding, those in poorly serviced, inadequate or damaged dwellings, and those likely to become homeless in the near future, especially on release from institutions (UNCHS, 2000). Other writers have introduced typologies of homelessness based on a range of factors. For example, Daly (1996) presents a typology based on risk, which is increasing as the global fiscal crisis undermines the once secure safety nets of welfare state and family responsibility (Forrest, 1999). Housing quality and security are presented as the bases for a typology by Daly (1994) and FEANTSA (1999). There is also a typology based on time in inadequate housing (Hertzberg, 1992; Kuhn and Culhane, 1998). Finally Neale (1997) proposes a typology based on responsibility for taking alleviating action. Writing on behalf of FEANTSA,<sup>5</sup> Avramov (1996) prefers a wide definition which includes the value-laden term 'adequate':

Homeless people are those who are unable to access a personal, permanent, adequate dwelling or to maintain such a dwelling due to financial constraints and other social barriers... (Avramov, 1996, 71, in FEANTSA, 1999, 10).

In the UN system, for statistical purposes, the expression 'homeless' refers to 'households without a shelter that would fall within the scope of living quarters...' (UN, 1998, 50)

Such accommodation-oriented definitions have been criticised because they have restricted the issue of homelessness to not having a house – to 'houselessness'. They do not do justice to the complexity of homelessness nor are they sufficient to describe the different realities of homelessness in every country (Cooper, 1995). Adequate housing

5 Fédération Européenne d'Associations Nationales Travaillant avec les Sans-Abri (Federation of European National Associations working with the Homeless).

was defined by Article 11 (1) of the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UNCESCR, 1991) in a similar but slightly less comprehensive manner than the later definition in the Habitat Agenda (UNCHS, 1997), paragraph 60, which defines 'adequate shelter' as follows:

Adequate shelter means more than a roof over one's head. It also means adequate privacy; adequate space; physical accessibility; adequate security; security of tenure; structural stability and durability; adequate lighting, heating and ventilation; adequate basic infrastructure, such as water-supply, sanitation and waste-management facilities; suitable environmental quality and health-related factors; and adequate and accessible location with regard to work and basic facilities: all of which should be available at an affordable cost. Adequacy should be determined together with the people concerned, bearing in mind the prospect for gradual development. Adequacy often varies from country to country, since it depends on specific cultural, social, environmental and economic factors.

Worldwide, approximately 1.8 billion people lack access to adequate water supply and 2.3 billion lack access to adequate sanitation (UN-Habitat, 2003: extrapolated from table B.4). If this process were continued for each measure of inadequacy, and all households whose accommodation could be classified as inadequate according to the first half of the above definition were included in the homelessness totals, most households in developing countries would be homeless. The second half acknowledges the importance of local factors and the 'prospect for gradual development', suggesting that dwellings on a potentially upward trajectory should be declared 'adequate'. In similar vein, FEANTSA (1999, 10) points out that, by adopting an approach based on including all inadequate housing, 'the unique distress and urgent needs of those people who are identified by a narrow definition are lost and neglected'.

In an attempt to follow FEANTSA, we believe that it is at least conceptually appropriate to try to differentiate between living in informal settlements, and other forms of homelessness, especially street-homelessness.<sup>6</sup> This is, perhaps, especially difficult when differentiating between clusters of street-homeless people who have made some attempt to construct shelters and the most rudimentary informal settlements where structures are flimsy and services absent.

Though we are not committed to excluding informal settlements from a definition of homelessness, we feel that, at the very least, there may be lessons to learn from this analysis. At the heart of this discussion is the difference between people who feel themselves to be, and are regarded as being, without a home, and those with a home which is seen to be inadequate in at least one of various ways either by them or by

6 Street-homelessness is used to refer to those who live on pavements, in public open space, on transport interchanges, by rivers, railways and drains, under bridges and in other public places. We include all those locations when referring to living in the street.

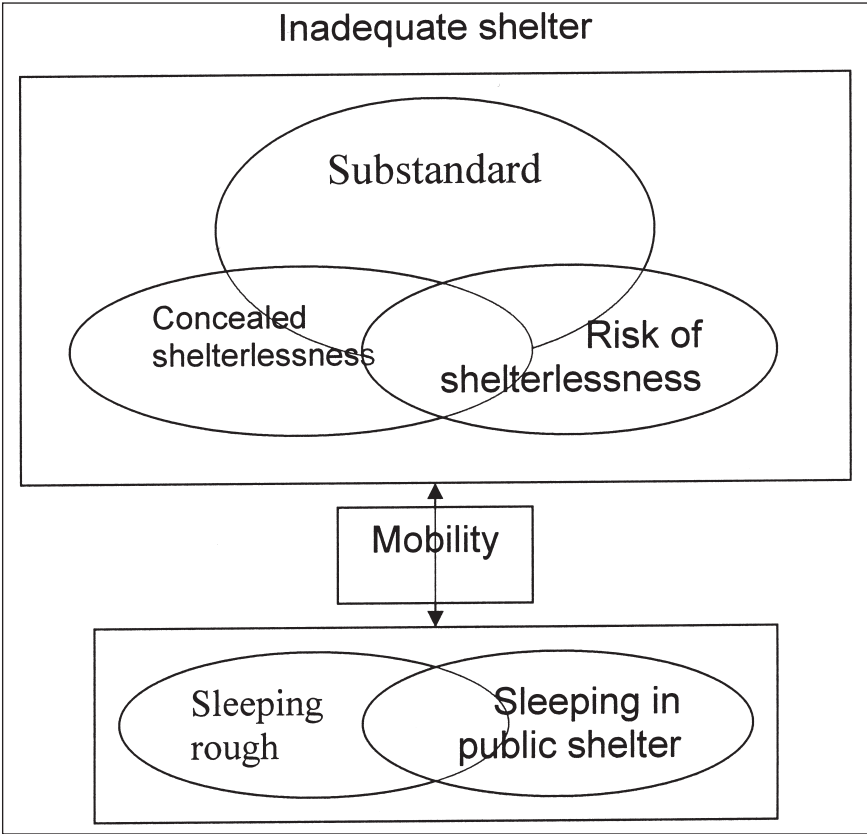


Figure 1 Springer’s categorisation of homelessness

the authorities, or both. Writers such as Dovey (1985), Somerville (1992), Watson and Austerbury (1986) and Kellett and Moore (2003) have explored the meaning of home and homelessness in depth. While some dwell on the dichotomous relationship in which the advantages of home are missing in homelessness (for example, Somerville’s [1992] useful tables), and others posit a home-to-homelessness continuum (Watson and Austerberry, 1986), Kellett and Moore (2003, 126) stress the need to examine the context of homelessness in the ‘wider processes of home-making and belonging in society’. From qualitative evidence in Colombia, they suggest that the owning of some tangible structure called home, no matter how poorly constructed it may be, is very important for a household’s security, freedom, autonomy, well-being and opportunity.

In 2000 UN-Habitat (then UNCHS [Habitat]) published a report on homelessness (UNCHS, 2000), prepared by the first author, in which it is obvious that there is very

little understanding of homelessness in developing countries. The current research arose out of that experience, in order to gather a preliminary idea of the nature, extent and causes of homelessness in developing countries and current policies towards homeless people. Through this research, we aim to understand where countries are at present in their attitudes to homelessness, including where policies are based more on prejudices than actualities, and to lay out failings as well as models. We found that, even where countries have quite advanced views on squatters and the informal sector,<sup>7</sup> their attitudes and action towards those they considered homeless could be draconian. Perceptions of homeless people tend to be largely negative – they are seen as villains, beggars, mentally ill, immoral, transients, non-citizens, loners and helpless. These perceptions lend little support to positive interventions with and on behalf of homeless people (Speak and Tipple, forthcoming).

Current definitions of homelessness in developing countries vary very considerably. In the UN-Habitat work, a preliminary internal document, later to be published as Springer (2000), set out a categorisation of homelessness based on the available literature and experience mainly in industrialised countries. The whole of homelessness is positioned within the context of inadequate shelter. Within this, there is a clear gulf between street-homeless people and those in sub-standard, insecure and shared accommodation, bridged by the possibility of mobility, but the diagram clearly suggests that there are intrinsic and significant differences between the conditions in the two rectangles. Following this diagram into policy, interventions are likely to focus on enabling the move from the lower state to the higher across the gulf, involving mobility from one shelter state (and location) to another. Springer's model suggests that the margin between people who are inadequately housed homeless and non-housed street-homeless is quite clear. We take this as our starting point.

## The study

Our DFID-sponsored study<sup>8</sup> attempted to examine the scale, causes and nature of homelessness in nine developing countries and responses to homelessness by the

7 Squatters are people who settle in buildings or on land for which they have no rights of occupation. They are included in the informal sector. Many settlers in the informal sector have acquired (and paid for) some rights of occupation through traditional owners or those who they believe to be owners. The informal housing sector generally constitutes all dwellings which do not conform to the legal instruments which rule formal residential development by virtue of insufficiently secure tenure and/or non-compliance with building or planning regulations. The formal and informal sector are not in a dichotomous relationship but tend to grade into each other as buildings on formally secure land do not conform to building regulations or formally approved building standards are used without planning permission being granted.

8 ESCOR Research No.ESA343, 2001–2003. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) supports policies, programmes and projects to promote international development. DFID provided funds for this study as part of that objective but the views and opinions expressed are those of the authors alone.

**Table 1 Differentiating factors between inadequately housed and homeless people in informal settlements and street-homeless people**

Differentiation factors	People in informal settlements		Street/homeless people
	Inadequately housed	Homeless	
<i>Security</i>			
Type of settlement	Spontaneous/informal	Spontaneous	Spontaneous
Access to land	Invasion (legal)	Invasion (illegal)	Invasion/illegal
Type of government land	Not assigned for other use or not likely to be used as intended	May be assigned for other use	Assigned for other use
Security of tenure	Partial or temporary/psychological security	None, little or misplaced psychological security	None
Permanence	Permanent	Not permanent	Not permanent/itinerant
Level of consolidation on the site	Consolidated	Not consolidated	Stable/more problematic
<i>Type of accommodation and location</i>			
Physical planning	Quasi/informal planning	Quasi/informal planning	Not planned
Building quality	Improving/consolidating	Not improving/consolidating	Stable or deteriorating
Type of building materials	Wood, iron sheets, sometimes mud, brick or stone walls	Scavenged wood, iron sheets	Scavenged cardboard boxes/blankets, plastic sheets
Life span of housing	More than 5 years	Under 5 years	Weeks or months
Personal safety	Moderate safety	Minimum safety	Not safe
Type of accommodation	Renting or informally constructed owner occupation	Renting or informally constructed owner occupation	Night shelter, under flyovers, in stations, pipes, etc.
Location	Tend to be in the urban periphery	Inner city or urban periphery	Inner-city areas
Growth	Increases/expands in density over a limited area	Increases/expands in density over a limited area	Expands without control
<i>Social status and organisation</i>			
Social status	Low but accepted for most employment	Low but accepted for most employment	Not trusted, lowest status
Recognition as citizens	Sometimes ID and ration cards can be obtained by political patronage	Sometimes ID and ration cards can be obtained by political patronage	Non-existent
Employment	Fulltime in most cases, low-paid manual and domestic work. Many small businesses	Lowest paid manual and domestic work, some unemployed/very erratic; begging. Few small businesses	Lowest paid manual and domestic work, some unemployed/very erratic; begging.



Community organisation	Organised into CBOs	May organise over time into CBOs	Not organised
Response of government	Upgrading	Resettlement/often summary eviction	Non-recognition/demolition and relocation
<i>Access to services</i>			
Access to facilities, e.g., banking	Difficult	Difficult	Impossible
Access to services	Partial, often illegally connected, likely to improve	Very basic, often illegally connected, or none. Unlikely to improve	None or a few street taps and public toilets

Source: Based on tables compiled by the Egypt and India teams, 2001 and Olufemi (1998) for South Africa; modified by the authors.

authorities and NGOs there. We asked each of the researchers in the nine countries (Bangladesh, PR China, India and Indonesia in Asia; Egypt, Ghana, South Africa and Zimbabwe in Africa; and Peru in Latin America)<sup>9</sup> to explore (inter alia) the differences between those people regarded as squatters or occupants of informal settlements and others regarded as homeless in their countries.

### Differences between conditions of occupants of informal settlements and homeless people

In most of the countries studied there is no official definition of homelessness for policy purposes. It is, therefore, very difficult to place informal settlements in relationship to homelessness. However, several countries have a definition for census or other purposes which gives some idea of whether people in informal settlements in those countries are regarded as homeless.

Several countries consider only those people with no roof over their heads, however poor or inappropriate, legal or otherwise, to be homeless. Within this definition, squatters in Bangladesh, India or Ghana<sup>10</sup> would be considered as homeless. Some countries place the emphasis on tenure. For example, in Zimbabwe, anyone who does not own a formal sector dwelling is classed as homeless.<sup>11</sup> Thus, squatters, not owning the land on which they squat, fall into this category, however good a dwelling they have. Conversely, someone owning a formal dwelling that is now dilapidated or unsafe is not homeless because they own their own home. Similarly, in Peru the emphasis

9 Our attempt at a tenth case study, in Bolivia, was unsuccessful. See acknowledgements for researchers' names.

10 Because of traditional land holding practices there, there are very few squatters in Ghana.

11 This astonishing categorisation arises because anyone who does not own such a dwelling is entitled to be on the Official Housing Waiting List for housing by their municipality. It is accepted by all relevant institutions except the Civic Forum for Housing (CFH) (Kamete, 2001).

is upon tenure, so squatters may be regarded as homeless as they do not have legal tenure to the land on which they live. Again, ironically, those who own old houses too dilapidated and dangerous to live in are not classed as homeless.

Three of our case studies (Egypt, India and South Africa) offered tables to demonstrate the difficulty of differentiating between people in informal settlements and homeless people in their countries. We aggregated all the characteristics mentioned in the three and, in the discussion that follows, we assess whether clear differences can be found and thresholds drawn between people in informal settlements and homeless people or whether all should be grouped together. In the light of that discussion, we have divided the people in informal settlements into two categories, attempting to separate inadequately housed from homeless. Table 1 shows our categorisation based on the three country categorisations and forms the basis for the remainder of the paper. We use the groups of factors to order the discussion.

## Security

Although squatters and other residents of informal settlements are unlikely to have complete security of tenure, they tend to have more than street-homeless people. The level of security is often used as a measure by which to differentiate between types of informal settlements, or different groups of residents and, thus, may be useful in deciding which people in informal settlements are homeless. For example, tenants and sub-tenants living in squatter and informal settlements are usually more insecure than owners there (Durand-Lasserve and Royston, 2002).

Security factors hinge largely on secure land tenure rather than on security from harm. De facto security is a contentious issue: it means that occupants have the security that comes from being unlikely to be moved on. Squatters often perceive themselves to be absolutely safe even though they have no legal rights. They may be able to sell their interest in land through some sort of informal market even though there may be no legal right so to do. Alternatively, they may not have that ability but still feel completely secure (Payne, 2002). However, some street-homeless people may also have de facto security through one-off or periodic payments made to police officers or influential citizens. Both in settlements and on the street, those who have reasonable grounds for believing that they will not be moved off have such an advantage over their peers who know they are insecure that they are qualitatively different and probably should not be regarded as homeless. This difference is sometimes based on whether there is an alternative zoning or commitment for the land which may be fulfilled in the future. Sometimes, the attitudes of the authorities are all-important; where people in informal settlements are likely to be evicted, they are more likely to be reasonably regarded as homeless.

In all our nine countries, both people in informal settlements and homeless

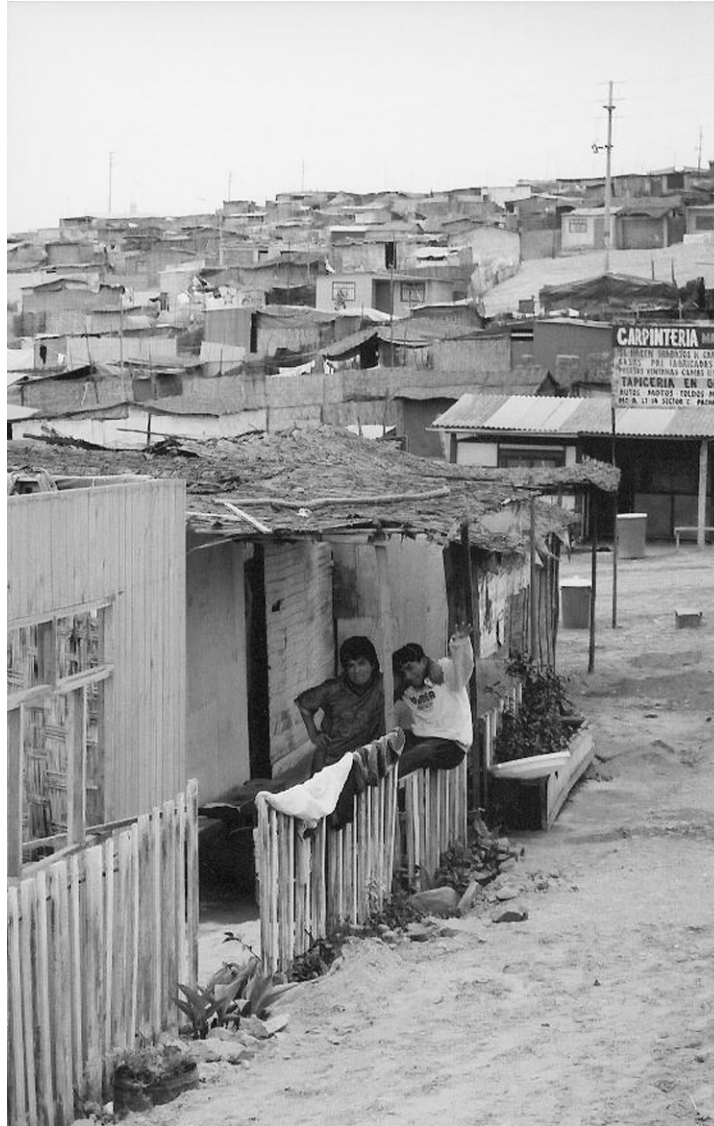


Figure 2 Patchacutec informal settlement, Lima, Peru

people are technically living illegally in some way and both suffer raids and evictions. However, people in informal settlements can be much more difficult to move than street-homeless people. In Peru, squatters settling on state land or occupying private property and remaining there unchallenged for over 24 hours cannot be evicted without a court order. Owners often prefer to settle out of court and sell the land to

the squatters for a low price as the court is likely to allow them to remain if the land has been unused for over ten years. Despite this, there have been a number of notable and violent evictions. For example, in January 2000 more than 10,000 invaders on agricultural plots at the southern edge of Lima were forcibly evicted and transferred to a desert area to the north of Lima, creating the settlement of Patchacutec (Fig. 2).

In Zimbabwe, all people in informal settlements are regarded as homeless. However, because of the country's notoriously tough anti-squatter laws<sup>12</sup> (Mafico, 1991), there is a neat legal divide between a *vagrant* (a street-homeless person) and a *squatter* (somebody who 'wrongfully and illegally'<sup>13</sup> occupies land or a building to which he/she is not entitled). In Indonesia, on the other hand, the legal difference between people in informal settlements and homeless people is less clear. Members of neither group are registered as residents of the city.

Squatters settling on, or invading, publicly owned land are often tolerated in our study countries. The unplanned settlements that have resulted in Egyptian cities are of two types according to the land on which they occur.

1. Informal settlements on agricultural land represent 80 per cent of the unplanned settlements and accommodate almost 40 per cent of the urban population of Egypt, or about 12 million people (Sims, 2002). In them, there is informal subdivision of privately owned land into small plots which are bought by individuals to develop.
2. Settlements on 'state' or 'public domain' land:
  - State domain land is usually desert land. Settlements thereon tend to be called squatter settlements and they are quite likely to receive official recognition.
  - Public domain land is reserved or used for utilities, military installations, urban development, and government development. Settlements on it are highly unlikely to be recognised by the government so occupants are less secure.

In China, over many years, the household registration system and restriction on movement has limited urban–rural migration and, to a degree, controlled the growth of cities. However, in recent years, with the relaxation of the control on movement, China has seen large numbers of migrants to the urban area, mostly without permission to travel, who are no longer resident in the area in which they are registered. This 'floating population' is the context for discussions of homelessness in China. Among them, the least rooted, those who do not re-register for a Temporary Living Permit<sup>14</sup> in the new place and are considered illegal by the government, are labelled *mangliu*, meaning 'blindly floating people'. They tend to live in their own settlements or communities (Wu, 2000) which the government will tolerate if the households have very low incomes and are not using their dwellings for commercial use. Such structures

<sup>12</sup> They were strictly enforced until after the study, at least in urban centres.

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly these are words that are in the legal brief that is read to somebody accused of any type of theft.

<sup>14</sup> Reasons for not registering include having more than the permitted single child.

may be vulnerable in a clean-up operation, however, such as the one that preceded the APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) Conference in Shanghai in 2001, with no compensation in the form of other land on which to settle.<sup>15</sup> The *mangliu* also occupy areas of poor-quality private housing, often based around villages subsumed into the city (known as *chengzhongcun*) and subsequently developed by house-owners keen to make money from rooming accommodation. Residents there endure poorer conditions and less security than those living in work-unit housing. Where the private-sector provision is through informal construction of low quality, it has many of the hallmarks of squatter settlements (Zhang et al., 2003).

In Ghana, there are virtually no squatters as control over most land is vested in local chiefs who are vigilant over it. Even the lowest-quality housing in the cities tends to be on land held legally under customary tenure acquired through the chiefs. However, there are a few cases in Greater Accra and Kumasi where rich and not so rich people have squatted on government-acquired land, confident that the government will not move them off. Occupants would regard themselves as permanent and many have built large houses in high-quality materials. They would certainly not be regarded as homeless by anyone there. Since our study, wooden shacks have appeared along the railway line in Kumasi and have been rebuilt after destruction by fire (Jørgen Eskemose, personal communication, 2004). Again, the residents are unlikely to regard themselves as homeless, but people sleeping in the bus station or on a veranda would.

Within what we refer to as street-homeless people, our India researcher distinguishes between 'street sleepers' and 'pavement dwellers'. Street sleepers have access to a room for meals and some social life but, owing to the number of people sharing the room, they sleep in the street. They are mostly men. On the other hand, the pavement dwellers eat, sleep and live on the pavement (or other components of the 'street' as defined above). Some may construct rudimentary, semi-permanent shelters from plastic sheets, cloth or cardboard as protection against rain, sun and passers-by. There are some who have chosen the street for economic or other reasons, while others are reluctant to sleep on the pavement but have nowhere else to go. Pavement dwellers may include entire households. Many live in small groups for safety, forming loose, small, but relatively stable communities around a specific interest or activity. They may gradually consolidate their domain on the street using poles, plastic sheets, cloth or cardboard. They are not settling *en masse*, nor are they sleeping rough on the streets, moving each night, as is the common perception of street-homeless people. They are illegal and, in theory, may be arrested in the same way as other street sleepers, under the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act. However, in reality, these groups often survive several years. Figure 3 shows one small settlement of rag pickers who have lived in the

15 The same happened to street dwellers in Bangkok for the APEC meeting in 2003 (Kitchootrakul and Sukin, 2003).

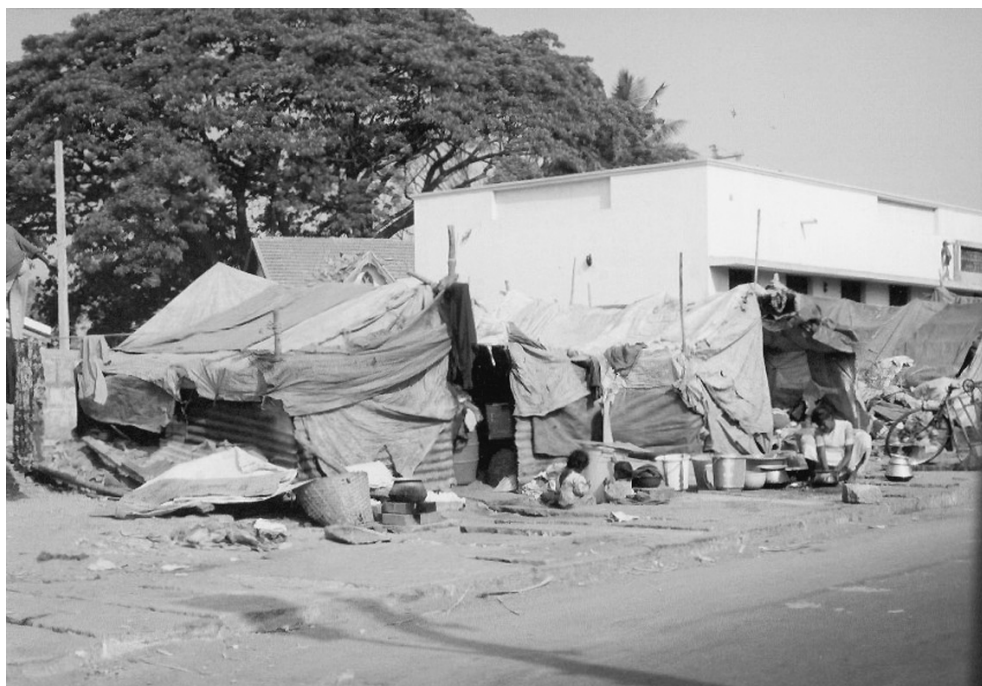


Figure 3 Rag pickers' dwellings, Bangalore, India

same location on the street in Bangalore, southern India, for several years.

In many of our studied countries, informal settlements may contain structures that could satisfy the building codes even though they are on illegally occupied land (cf. Lim, 1987). Despite this, people in informal settlements in Zimbabwe appear to be as insecure as street sleepers. In the five years to 2002, an average of one raid per week was mounted in the country against such settlements. Some may go for months without disturbances until some issue in the press, council or courts galvanises the riot police or municipal police into action, sometimes supported by the army and regular police (DSHZ and ZIHOPFE, 2000). More recently, of course, Operation Murambatsvina has decimated informal settlements.

In general in our case studies, a greater tolerance is extended to people in informal settlements than to street-homeless households or individuals, sometimes markedly so. Street sleepers are more insecure than people informally living together on a piece of land. However, although people in informal settlements are less likely to be moved, it could be argued that, if they are, they have more to lose than other homeless people in terms of any small investment in their dwelling or in social networks which might have begun to evolve. Moreover, larger-scale evictions are often forced and violent in nature and cause considerable distress (Agbola and Jinadu, 1997).



## Location and type of accommodation

Homeless people tend to be scattered in the vacant spaces in inner city areas close to casual working opportunities. In contrast, most informal settlements in Egypt, China, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Peru have been developed at the urban periphery. In some of our case study countries, however, some lower-standard informal settlements are centrally located, insecurely occupying odd scraps of land or work sites. Illegal settlements in Indonesia (*kampung liar*) tend to be on unattended (in most cases government-owned) plots of land in urban areas (Yudohusodo and Salam, 1991) such as on riverbanks, along drainage canals, along railway tracks and in station yards, and near market places. They are not included in improvement or servicing plans and their residents, like homeless people, are not entitled to identity cards (see below).

The different levels of security of settlements are often directly reflected in the willingness of occupants to invest in housing improvement and consolidation. Those who feel insecure are more likely to use scavenged materials barely more durable than those used by street-homeless people. Those with some security are likely to construct in a manner and to a standard similar to rural housing – outside building regulations but likely to last for a few years without major rebuilding.

A few homeless people in developing countries seek shelter in disused buildings in a way which mirrors squatters in Europe and North America. The Drill Hall in downtown Johannesburg is one such building now intensively occupied by homeless people.

Single informal settlements may contain the range of dwelling quality from very poor shelters, little better than those of street-homeless people, to quite well-constructed and ‘permanent’ dwellings. There is often a relationship between the length of stay in the settlement and dwelling quality but this is unlikely to be as close as suggested in early work by Turner (1976). There is often, though, a relationship between perceived security and dwelling quality. In Peru, organisations in informal settlements tend to approach the government for legal title to the land and, over time, succeed. Meanwhile, the activity of the community-based organisation and the consequent expectation of legalisation encourage investment in improving the quality of shelter and bringing services in. Figures 4 to 6 illustrate the range of quality of dwellings in one settlement. The occupants of the most well-constructed dwelling settled several years earlier than the others.

In Indian cities there has been a marked increase in the willingness of slum households to invest both labour and capital resources in upgrading their settlements. Communities, NGOs and even some private companies have taken on public agendas for improving living conditions (Kundu, 2002). In most cases, however, residents’ willingness to invest is, understandably, determined by perceived assurances from the authorities that they will not be evicted.



Figures 4



Figures 5





Figure 6.

Figures 4, 5, and 6 show different degrees of dwelling construction in the same settlement in Lima, Peru.

Although many informal settlements have been improved over the years, the less secure, unconsolidated settlements are more likely to be resettled as a means of improvement or to be subjected to summary (and often violent) eviction if clearance is decided upon. In this respect, the residents of such informal settlements are more like street-homeless people, subject to regular clearance.

Street-homeless people tend not to improve their shelters, keeping to salvaged materials that are flimsy and that tend not to be weather-proof for long. In India, however, some people living on the street construct durable dwellings to rival those in established informal settlements but in the most insecure of locations. Figure 7, one of many dwellings built across a pavement in Mumbai, shows this.

Street-homeless people are unlikely to have their shelter upgraded. This arises partly from their location, centrally in cities and on public spaces. There are some examples of improved water supply to street dwellers, through the provision of stand-pipes and public toilets on the streets, in India and Indonesia, for example, but generally street-homeless shelters are not on an improving trajectory.



Figure 7. A homeless household's dwelling, constructed across a pavement in India. The foreground is one lane of a six-lane highway

### **Social status and organisation**

A lack of connection to society is one of the important components of the distress, loss and neglect afflicting homeless people in Europe and North America (FEANTSA, 1999). In industrialised countries, they tend to be disconnected from employment and all the social and economic links and opportunities presented therein (Caplow et al., 1968).

### Social status

People in informal settlements tend to suffer from poor status because of their non-conventional neighbourhoods. However, there is some evidence from our Peruvian case study that the longer established settlements, where building quality has improved over time, are less stigmatised than newer settlements. Nevertheless, we do not feel we have sufficient evidence to cite status or stigma as a differentiating characteristic.

### Citizenship rights

In many countries, both street-homeless people and people in informal settlements are equally without citizenship rights. In India, they are unlikely to have ration cards and will not be able to vote. In China, the *mangliu* are not entitled to housing, education, or many other social benefits available to the registered population in their place of occupation. They can only access them in their place of registration (Li, 2002). They are, thus, likely to be under- or unemployed. Until recently, *mangliu* were subject to forced 'repatriation' to their place of registration. However, in 2003, following allegations of torture by a young man, all repatriation stations changed into 'succour stations' where *mangliu* can choose to go for help – for food, shelter or tickets to go home. Although the policy aroused much comment from local government and academics, repatriation stations in most cities are adjusting to their new role. There was concern that the removal of 'repatriation' would result in many beggars but the increase appears to have been smaller than expected (Hou Li, personal communication, November 2003). No differentiation appears to be made between the few *mangliu* who live on the street and those in *chengzhongcun* with respect to citizenship rights. In Indonesia, both people in informal settlements and homeless people lack identity cards (*karta tanda penduduk – KTP*) through which they are officially registered as citizens and can receive social services such as schooling. Many street-homeless people in South Africa lose their identity cards (often through theft) and so lose their citizenship rights.

### Employment opportunities

Employment seems to offer some differentiation. While homeless people in industrialised countries tend to be unemployed, most homeless people in developing countries earn an income, however inadequate and irregular it may be. They tend to engage in casual labour; typical jobs are construction and other labouring, domestic work, catering work (cooking, waiting on tables, washing up), market portering, rickshaw pulling or hand-cart pushing, shoe-shining, hawking and peddling, waste-picking, 'guarding' cars and begging. There is little evidence to suggest that homeless

people in most of our case studies are more likely to be unemployed than the lowest income people living in established neighbourhoods.

Swaminathan (1995) compared pavement dwellers in Mumbai with people living in low-quality tenements in nearby Dharavi and found that all live in conditions characterised by terrible poverty, squalor and deprivation. Their work and incomes are quite similar but there are many more homeless women in work than their housed counterparts. We suspect, however, that those in secure and consolidated settlements are more likely to have businesses, especially in the home. Although the recent CARDO study showed that home-based businesses are present even in the poorest quality of housing, better housing conditions help their survival through the advantages of having mains services and the security for stock and equipment from stouter dwelling construction (Tipple, 2004). Therefore, those in better-established settlements are less like street-homeless people who live more opportunistic lifestyles, while those in poorer settlements are, like street-homeless people, less able to establish enterprises. There are, however, interesting examples of entrepreneurship even among occupants of homeless shelters. In Johannesburg, occupants in Usindiso shelter are involved in a carpentry business together (Olufemi, 2001).

Unlike in many industrialised countries, the status of homelessness does not appear to be a barrier to working, except in China where the *mangliu* have no access to formal work and tend to work for private firms and individuals.

### Social networks

Connection with society not only relates to civil rights but is also experienced through social networks. Those who write about the meaning of home often cite the importance of it as a base from which to access and develop social networks (e.g., Somerville, 1992). Homeless people in general have very few social networks to connect them into the society around them. They may sleep in a different location every night or, indeed, several locations each night and can develop few social networks with others in the same circumstances. However, many are still firmly connected with their village society, sending money home to maintain a family and supplement meagre farm incomes. Some street-homeless people live in groups or settlements which have developed robust community structures and organisations. Within this environment, closer mutually supportive relationships can develop between households, especially where there is a level of social cohesion and networking with long-standing neighbours. In India, we found street-homeless people searching out others like them for marriage partners for their children in the way they would have otherwise looked to their home village. Such situations are more likely to embody the attributes of 'home' and less likely to represent homelessness for their occupants, as they form closer relationships with others around.

### Community organisation

Community organisation appears to be an important differentiating feature between people in informal settlements and homeless people. Street-homeless people in some of our study countries are very transient, subjected to frequent removal by the authorities. Thus, they are not involved in groups of their peers, suffer a lack of connection to society and are not easily located by NGOs offering support. The lone homeless person is very vulnerable, especially on South Africa's streets. Stories of their losing everything, including their identity papers, are common (e.g., Plaatjies, 1999). Homeless people who are living in small settlements on the streets, sharing with friends in rented rooms, or in shared housing or shacks usually do not have the means or awareness to organise themselves into community-based organisations or even to define a physical boundary for their areas. There is often a measure of 'sticking up for each other' in an ad hoc manner, however, when outside threats arise.

In informal settlements, community-based organisations can be very slow to form and in the early days there is little in the way of mutual support or organisation. However, the possession of a roofed structure which can be registered in some way gives its residents a de facto address that helps them to gain NGO assistance, for example for credit, education, water and sanitation, especially where assistance relies on traceable networks to provide social collateral in the absence of monetary assets.<sup>16</sup>

By virtue of their more static nature and the weight of numbers, people in informal settlements are more likely to have strong internal community-based organisations (CBOs) and to develop their own social networks for support and some measure of protection from outsiders and from the authorities. Informal settlement CBOs may represent residents in lobbying for social and economic improvements with government officials, donor organisations, or NGOs involved in community development.

While there are many instances of representative organisations from informal settlements winning concessions and services for their members, there are few where homeless people have managed to organise and lobby for improvements. A recent exception has been assistance given by the Slum/Shack Dwellers International affiliates to homeless people in several cities around the world. One of the first to be documented was the assistance given to the Mumbai Pavement Dwellers Federation by the SPARC/ Mahila Milan / National Slum Dweller's Federation (NSDF) Alliance (Indian NGOs.com, 2004). The participation of people in very insecure informal settlements in the process of relocation features in SPARC's successful experience with the voluntary removal of 60,000 people living in informal settlements beside railway tracks in Mumbai and in developing their internal community organisation. Through

<sup>16</sup> This is the pattern for Bangladesh's Grameen Bank and similar micro-lenders which lend to groups of women using their social ties to secure the loan.

the self-enumeration, inhabitants were able to ensure that the burdens and benefits were appropriately targeted and equitably shared (Patel et al., 2002).

In South and South East Asia, we find some similarity between people in informal settlements and street-homeless people in terms of their internal organisation and community development. The groups of people who establish small, street-based settlements of several households in Indian cities tend to have lived there for many years and display characteristics that are much more like those of people in informal settlements than of other street-homeless people. Indeed, they form a small but tight and supportive community. In some cases, as with the group of rag pickers in Bangalore (Figure 3), settlements may eventually be recognised and scheduled for upgrading which gives residents rights, for example the right to vote, which other street sleepers do not have.

### **Access to services**

For people living on the streets, the lack of privacy which follows from having no walls means that washing and excreting generally occur in public or in a public convenience where available. Some cities, notably in India, now provide standpipes and bathing places for street-homeless people, and public toilets open at least during the day. In this respect, some street-homeless people may have greater access to services than some people in informal settlements.

Though many people in informal settlements have no access to formal power, water and sanitation infrastructure, many have at least some (usually informal) services to the dwelling or nearby relatively early in their existence. The web of cables above many informal settlements attests to the courage and ingenuity of people in tapping illegally into the power lines. Wells and pit latrines often provide at least some water supply and sanitation. Again, however, the residents of newer and less well-established informal settlements are more like street-homeless people in having to find water and sanitation services where they can, and this can be both dangerous and humiliating.

In line with experience on secure tenure, the longer an informal settlement exists, the more likely it is to attract power, water and sanitation services. In addition, the extent to which such services are available to informal settlements depends, to a degree, on whether they are provided by nationalised or privatised industries and the ethos of the national government. In Peru, the semi-privatised power companies quickly establish networks in informal settlements and many people connect their dwellings to the networks illegally.



## Conclusions

There is a great need for clarity in policy dealing with homes for the poorest echelons in developing country societies. Within the context of the enabling approach, recommended interventions tend to be on the demand side; improving employment and incomes to allow households to afford more housing. Thus, where supply-side interventions are adopted for those who cannot afford housing through the prevailing market, their effective operation is likely to rely on their accurate targeting. Especially where subsidised housing is to be provided for those in greatest need, its viability and political acceptability may depend on the threshold of qualification adopted and its distribution only within the qualifying group. Thus, being able to argue for a plausible threshold between homelessness and housing that is inadequate but acceptable for the time being is a useful tool in targeting any subsidies to those most in need, and an antidote to the probability that only the better off within the target group will benefit from MDG 7, target 11.

Our study has indicated that the difference between living in informal settlements and homelessness is not clear cut. The range of characteristics which informal settlements and their occupants display leads us to conclude that, although most may live in housing which can be classified as 'inadequate', many people in informal settlements do not justify the classification of homelessness. Our argument is made in terms of their security, dwelling quality and location, social organisation, employment opportunities and access to services. Perceived security is very important as it leads to the circumstances which encourage permanence: growth in population, incremental shelter improvements, servicing opportunities and the clout to lobby successfully.

We have found more social networks and community-based organisations among homeless people in developing countries than the western-based literature might lead us to expect. Glasser (1994) quotes a definition of homelessness, as suggested by Caplow et al. (1968, 494), as follows:

Homelessness is a condition of detachment from society characterised by the absence or attenuation of the affiliative bonds that link settled persons to a network of interconnected social structures.

It is not helpful, however, to assume that street-homeless people in developing countries are as isolated from mainstream society as many of those in industrialised countries. Employment opportunities also appear to be a useful indicator of difference. People whose home environment is exposed or of poor quality and insecure are unlikely to be running enterprises, but many people in informal settlements do so.

One major characteristic encompassing several factors is the ability of people to improve their housing and other circumstances. People in informal settlements are quite likely to see themselves on an upwards housing trajectory, on which their shelters

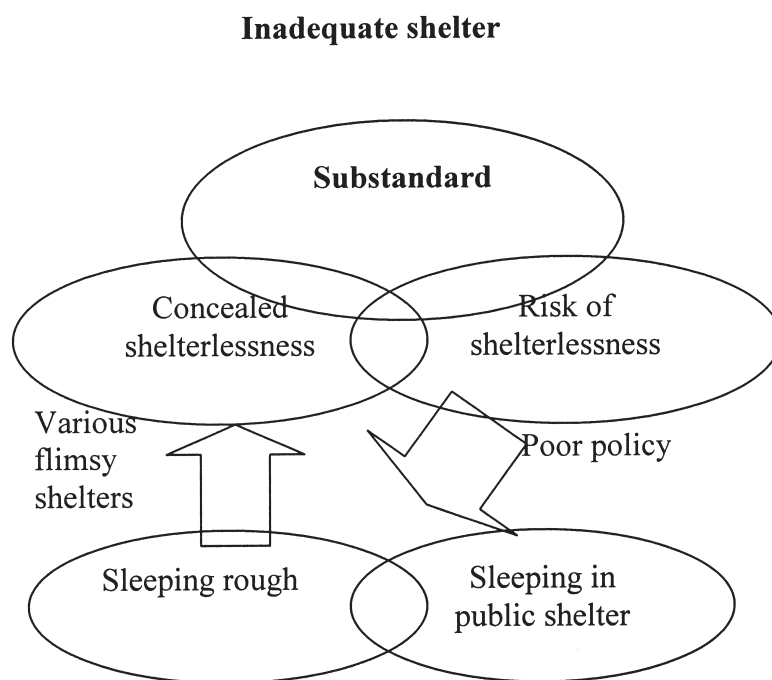


Figure 8 Modification of Springer's diagram in the light of our study

and the services provided are likely to improve over time. In most cases, street-homeless people do not perceive themselves to be on an upwards trajectory. In particular, as they live in almost constant fear of being moved on, they are most unlikely to invest in their dwellings. This is, perhaps, the key difference between people who are reasonably regarded as homeless and those who are not, and probably the most important point to come out of our case studies to differentiate people in informal settlements from street dwellers who have shelters. If the circumstances of a settlement enable its denizens to improve their lives, we would argue that they should not be regarded as homeless and their housing should be included in the housing stock calculation, albeit with caveats on the need to improve.

Internationally, it is difficult to draw firm thresholds from our study. Although we have shown there to be real differences between street-homeless people and people in informal settlements, they present a fuzzy and chimerical margin rather than the 'clear water' implied in Springer's diagram (Figure 1). There appears to be much overlap between the less well-established informal settlements and groups of street-homeless people, and some differences between the poorer and better ends of the informal settlement spectrum. This is not very effectively modelled by the gulf in Springer's



diagram, crossed only by mobility. In India and Bangladesh, street-homeless people can make progress towards living in informal settlements by building better shelters and lobbying for in situ recognition. In simple terms, someone begins by lying on a bare pavement and progresses through very rudimentary shelters to more permanent dwellings on roughly the same ground. At some time in this process, the individual is joined by his wife and children.<sup>17</sup> In this case differentiation between street-homelessness and living in informal settlements must be made according to tenure security and building quality, and the shift was made without location change.

The in situ improvement and the much fuzzier boundary evident from our study can be demonstrated in a modification of Springer's diagram (Figure 8). In it we do not separate her groups 'sleeping rough' or 'sleeping in shelters' from the others in separate 'boxes' as we cannot identify such a consistent divide in the reality of our nine case studies. We place them nearer together to demonstrate the difficulty of distinguishing between them. Furthermore, the circumstances separating street-homeless people and people in informal settlements in Springer's 'concealed shelterlessness' can be bridged by some, especially in India and Bangladesh, through incremental improvements to their accommodation in public space without mobility. In addition, we recognise that current housing policies often conspire to tip some in inadequate housing into the homeless categories. Many occupants of informal settlements are forcibly evicted and their dwellings are removed, rendering them truly homeless. More attention should be given to avoiding poor policies which increase the numbers of people in the homeless categories and increase those enjoying improved security, servicing, physical conditions and the other benefits of housing in urban areas. In this, the recent events in Zimbabwe are wholly destructive and are rightly condemned internationally.

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<sup>17</sup> The pioneer is usually a man.

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